

Jean de la Taille's La Famine, ou Les Gabeonites (1573)
An English Translation of Act II

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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Abstract

One of the greatest challenges in translating any work from a foreign language into English is correctly conveying the meaning of the author's thoughts and statements. It often involves a bit of interpretation and artistic license on the part of the translator. However, translating a work that is centuries old brings in even more difficulties with differences in vocabulary, syntax, content, and context. For my senior thesis, I translated Act II of French playwright Jean de la Taille's play *La Famine, ou Les Gabeonites*. I have translated the act on my own with the help of Randle Cotgrave's "A Dictionarie of the French and English Tongues" of 1611 and the Oxford-English Dictionary Online and later worked on improving that translation with a group of students and with Dr. Donald Gilman, an expert in the field of sixteenth-century French Literature. With the aid of these sources, I believe that I have produced a suitable translation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Dr. Donald Gilman for aiding and familiarizing me with the translation process. He helped immensely when I needed assistance in correctly conveying the meaning of the text into colloquial English. I would also like to thank Kathryn Smith—another student who translated the first act of *La Famine, ou Les Gabeonites*—as well as Stasi Meyers, who aided in refining my translations during our collaborative sessions.

Introduction

When I set out to translate Jean de la Taille's play, *La Famine, ou les Gabeonites*, I did not realize the massive undertaking. The translation of any work is difficult, of course, but de la Taille's writing style made this translation extremely difficult for several reasons.

One of the main obstacles I encountered while working on my translation of Act II was the particular syntax that is used throughout the play. Modern French—the style I am most familiar with—builds sentences much like English, with a subject, followed by a verb, and completed by the predicate. In de la Taille's work, however, the sentences are written with the pieces often in a peculiar, seemingly nonsensical order. Some sentences end with the subject and some begin with the predicate. This extremely unusual syntax made translation difficult, especially because not all sentences shared this strange sentence format. However, in spite of these syntactical challenges, were some sentences that were formatted in a more “normal” sense. The constant changes added to the struggle.

Similarly, as were many writers during de la Taille's era, this author elaborates and embellishes the elaborations of his thoughts extensively. Many sentences go on for one half of a page, which makes it easy to lose focus on the subject he is actually trying to address in the sentence. In order to correctly convey the meaning of the lines, I sometimes had to rearrange entire lines, moving them up or down in the order so that I could assure a clear rendering. It was also difficult at times to know exactly what de la Taille was trying to say with these long sentences. It often involved a bit of interpretation on my part, another obstacle to overcome during this translation experience.

Perhaps the most taxing problem I encountered while translating this particular text was the heavy allusions to Biblical stories and happenings. During de la Taille's time, the majority of

spectators and readers would be familiar with the Biblical references made in the work. This story of Saul, Merobe, and Rezefe that was told in the second act refers largely to the books of Samuel 1 and Samuel 2 in the Old Testament. Occasionally, I did not fully comprehend de la Taille's thoughts since he was referring to obscure biblical names, places, or events. As such, I had to consult the King James Bible in order to correctly translate his words. Sifting through the two books of Samuel took a great deal of time, effort, and energy because I had to search for specific references. A reading of these books, then, elucidated de la Taille's text more to place Saul, Merobe, and Rezefe's story within its context.

The originality of this thesis also presented another major challenge. Because it had never before been translated into English, I did not have any kind of precedent to look to when I encountered hurdles while translating.

Eventually I was able to overcome all difficulties of translation, and I have rendered, I believe, an accurate but readable translation of Act II of Jean de la Taille's *La Famine, ou Les Gabeonites*. This translation exercise proved much more difficult than I originally imagined, and I encountered hardships I had never seen before when translating more modern pieces in French. Through this intense workshop session, I believe that I have grown in my French abilities, and I have also come to further appreciate the beauty of French literature.

Works Cited

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ACTE SECONDE

MEROBE *fille de Saül* : et REZEFE *femme de Saül*

REZEFE

O de mes maux la compagne fealle,
 Pourquoi plains-tu ceste famine palle,
 Chere Merobe ? O qu'à ma voutenté
 Tout nostre peuple elle eut ja sacmenté !
 Si l'on regarde au mal qui se propose.
 Ja ja le sort redoublant ses allarmes
 Nous vient darder nouveau subject de larmes.

MEROBE

O toy, de qui pour le present j'emprunte
 L'affection de ma mere defuncte,
 Mon seul soulas et reconfort unique,
 Quel est ce sort qui de nouveau s'applique
 A nos malheurs, et, prodigue de maus,
 Encontre nouse atize ses assaus !

SECOND ACT

MEROBE, Saul's daughter: and REZEFE,
 Saul's wife

REZEFE

Oh, faithful companion of my woes,
 Why do you lament this piercing famine,
 Dear Merobe? Oh, how, because of my desire
 It has already slaughtered all our people!
 For we have scarcely suffered
 If one sees the agony that is expected.
 Already, already destiny increasingly sounding
 its alarms
 Arrives and hurls at us a new reason for grief.

MEROBE

Oh you, whose
 Affection for my deceased mother, I am
 beholden at this moment,
 My only solace and single comfort,
 What is this fate which again aggravates
 Our misfortunes, and, lavish in its woes,
 Embellishes its assaults against us!

REZEFE

Ce grand Seigneur, ce grand Dieu qui de rien
 Bastit le rond de ce val terrien,
 C'est luy, c'est luy qui contre nous conspire :
 Car ceste hayne, et ceste bouillante ire
 Que dans son cueur jadis à clous d'aymant
 Contre Saül il alloit imprimant,
 Durent encor, et sans estre soullees,
 Vont aboyans aux cendres Saülees.
 O Seigneur Dieu es-tu si coloré,
 Que tu ne sois encor desalteré
 De nostre sang apres la mort du roy ?

MEROBE

Veü que l'air n'est tousjours sombre de soy,
 Veü que tousjours l'Ocean n'est depit,
 Mais a par fois des Aquilons repit :
 Veü qu'à la fin les torrents se tarissent :
 Veü qu'à la fin les pierres s'aplainissent :
 Veü qu'à la fin l'arbre superbe tombe :
 Veü que le fer à la rouille succombe :

REZEFE

This great Lord, this great God who built from
 nothing
 This round earthly valley,
 It is he, it is he who conspires against us:
 For this hatred, and this boiling anger
 That he was formerly impinging upon his
 heart,
 With magnetic-like nails against Saul,
 Still remain, and without being defiled,
 They are crying out at Saul's ashes.
 Oh, dear Lord, are you so angered
 That you have not yet quenched your thirst
 With our blood after the death of the king?

MEROBE

Seeing that the air not always being dark in
 itself,
 Seeing that the ocean not always being angry,
 But now and then finding rest in Aquilon
 winds:
 Seeing in the end the torrents drying up:
 Seeing in the end rocks not being leveled:
 Seeing in the end the proud tree falling:
 Seeing in the end iron succumbing to rust:

Veu qu'à la fin les diamans se fendent,
 Et qu'à leur fin toutes choses se redent,
 O Eternel, faut-il que tu retiennes
 Sus les mortels tousjours les ires tiennes ?

REZEFE

Si tu avois telle inimitié prise
 Dessus ton Oinct pour sa faute commise,
 N'estoit-ce assez que l'esprit de Satan
 Le tormentast d'un diabolique tan ? N'estoit ce
 assez que le destin le fait
 Bourreau de soy lors qu'il fut deconfit,
 Avec ses fils en la triste journee
 Qui fut jadis sus Gelboë donnee ?
 N'estoit-ce assez qu'Isbozet en traison
 Fut assommé de ceuz qu'Abner perdit la vie
 Injustement par les fils de Sarvie ?
 Bref, n'est-ce assez que la maison de Cis

Seeing in the end the diamonds being broken
 to pieces,
 And that at their end, all things yielding,
 Oh Eternal God, must you always
 Channel your anger upon mortals?

REZEFE

If you had exerted such a hatred
 Upon your Anointed One for his committed
 offense,
 Was it not enough that the spirit of Satan
 Torment him with a diabolic fury?
 Was it not enough that fate
 Makes him an executioner of himself when he
 was defeated,
 With his sons on that sad day
 Which was formerly inflicted upon Gelboe?
 Was it not enough that Isbozet, who, because
 of treachery,
 Was struck down by those of his house?
 Was it not enough that Abner who lost his life
 Unjustly at the hands of the sons of Sarvie?
 In short, was it not enough that the house of
 Cis

Aye tant veu de ses seigneurs occis,
 S'il ne failloit qu'ores le residu
 Du sang royal fust aussi respandu ?

MEROBE

Comment sçav'ous qu'il est predestine,
 Que nostre sang soit tout exterminé ?
 Qui vous l'a dit ?

REZEFE

Ceste nuict precedente
 M'en a donné la notice evidente.
 Doncques ainsi que la nuit estoillee
 La terre avoit d'un manteau brun voilee,
 Un doux repos incognu ja pieça
 Mon corps lassé dans mon lit ambrassa :
 Voicy soudain que mon espous j'avise,
 Le roy SAUL, las, bien d'un autre guise
 Qu'il n'estoit lors quand le Voyant de Dieu
 L'establit roy dessus le peuple Hebrieu,
 Ou quand luy chef du camp Israelite,

Saw the slaughter of its lords,
 If only the rest of the royal blood
 Was now to be spilled?

MEROBE

How do you know that it has been ordained,
 That our people be completely annihilated?
 Who told you that?

REZEFE

The previous night
 Gave me clear evidence.
 So just as the star-filled night
 Had veiled the earth with a brown cloak,
 A calm, unknown rest embraced
 My wearied body which had been in my bed
 already for a long time:
 Suddenly, as I catch sight of my husband,
 Behold king SAUL, drained, indeed he was
 not like that at the time
 When the prophet of God
 Established him as king over the Hebrew
 people,
 Or when he, as leader of the Israelite camp,

Mettoit de loing les ennemis en fuite !

Las, il n'avoit cemaintien flamboyant,

Mais tout défait, hideus, et larmoyant!

Vous eussiez veu son corps de sang tout salle,

L'œil enfoncé, le visage tout palle,

Le chef poudreus, et la barbe crasseuse ;

Mais de le voir j'estois encor joyeuse,

Quand luy croullant son chef melancolique :

« Dors-tu (dit-il) ô ma femmee pudique ?

Ah, peus-tu bien dormir en ce temps-cy ?

O folle, hélas, sans prendre aucun soucy

Du mal voisin ? Mais va-t'en de bonne heure,

Va-t'en cacher, à fin qu'elle ne meure,

Nostre lignee et celle de Merobe :

Depesche-toy, qu'on ne nous la derobe

Pour appaiser demain votre famine,

Qui n'aura fin si ma race ne fine :

Tel est de Dieu la destinee horrible.

Sus, romps le somme, et t'efforce au possible,

Hastened his enemies to flee far away!

Alas, he did not have this swashbuckling
demeanor,

But completely defeated, hideous, and
lamenting!

You would have seen his body totally sullied
with blood,

His caved-in eye, his completely wan face,

His chalky head, and his filthy beard;

But I was still elated to see him again,

When he, shaking his melancholy head:

"Are you sleeping (he said) oh, my chaste
wife?

Ah, can you indeed sleep at this time,

Oh, crazed one, alas, without having any care

For our poor neighbor? But leave early,

Go into hiding, in order to preserve

Our family line, and Merobe's:

Hasten, so that it not be stolen from us

In order to satisfy your hunger tomorrow,

Which will end if my people die:

Such is God's dreadful destiny.

Above, awaken from your slumber, and strive
in every possible way

Que nostre sang à mort ne soit livré.
 Que trembles-tu? Ce que tu vois est vray. »
 Lors d'un horreur mon sommeil s'envola,
 Puis estendant mes bras deçà delà,
 Je m'esforçoy mon espoux d'accoller,
 Quand je le vy peu à peu s'ecouller
 Hors de mes yeux, ainsi que la fumee.

MEROBE

Hà, faut-il donc, ô race bienaymee,
 Que par ta mort meure nostre famine,
 Et qu'Israël vive par ta ruine ?
 Ah, que la peste et la mortalité,
 Et ddes fleaus, qui du Dieu depité.
 Furent dardez sur le Nil endurcy,
 Ores sur nous petillent sans mercy,
 Devant, hélas, qu'orfeline j'en soy,
 Afin qu'autruy de mon ennuy ayt joye.
 Verray-je donc mourir les enfans nostres
 Incontinent pour donner vie aux autres ?

That our family may not be given over to
 death.
 What are you trembling at? What you see is
 true."
 While my night terror took flight,
 Then extending my arms on both sides,
 I tried to embrace my husband,
 When I saw him evaporating little by little
 Out of my sight, just like smoke.

MEROBE

Ah, is it necessary, then, oh my beloved
 people
 For our starvation to die through your death,
 And for Israel to live through your
 destruction?
 Ah, for the plague and death,
 And scourges that
 Were flung on the obstinate Nile by a harsh
 God
 Now before I am orphaned,
 These hardships pelt us mercilessly,
 So that others may rejoice in my misery.
 Thus, will I, right now see our children die
 In order to give life to others?

Non, non, l'amour de mes fils est plus forte
Que celle-là qu'à mon pays je porte.

REZEFE

O mes chers fils, l'espoir de votre mere,
Le seur estoc de Saül votre père,
Duquel en tout vous retenez l'image :
Car tel son front, tel estoit son visage,
Il vous avoit le col ainsi haussé,
L'épaulle large, et le poil retroussé,
Un tel marcher, un tel port venerable,
Un tel regard et meintien tout semblable.
Bref, ô mes fils, pour ce qu'en vous je voy
De votre père encor je ne sçay quoy,
Vous empeschez mon ame de le suivre,
Et en mes maux vous me faites survivre.
C'est, c'est par vous qu'il me faut supplier

No, no, the love for my sons is stronger
Than that which I bear for my country.

REZEFE

Oh, my dear sons, the hope of your mother,
The eager heir of Saul your father,
Whom you resemble so completely:
For such was his forehead, such was his face,
He had held his head so high for you,
His wide shoulders, and his thick hair,
Such was his gait, such was his esteemed
bearing,
Such was his expression and such was his
completely similar demeanor.
In sum, oh my sons, for I see some of your
father in you,
That I still cannot grasp,
You prevent my soul from following him,
And you continue to have me live on in my
misery,
It is, it is through you that I must again
implore

<p>Encores Dieu, et le bien singulier De defier toutes adversitez En mes malheurs encores vous m'ostez. Quand est-ce hélas, que la mort paternelle Vous vangerez sus Achis le rebelle ? Et quand, vainqueurs de son dieu Ascarot, Vous détruirez Gaze, Geth, et Azot ? Quand vous verray-je, hélas, sus Israel, Reconquister le sceptre paternel ? Quand rendez-vous nostre race heritiere De son estat et dignité premiere ? Quand verron'-nous la semence de Jude Soubs Benjamin remise en servitude ? Quand verssons-nous hors du siege royal, Chassé David, comme le desloyal Vous a chassez ? ou bien quand verron'-nous Dessus Joabe, Abner vangé par vous ?</p> <p>MEROBE</p> <p>Ah, il n'est temps, il n'est temps, ô nous folles,</p>	<p>God, and you still take from me the particular ability To defy all adversity In my misfortune. When, alas, will you avenge your father's death, On Achis, the rebel? And when, conquerors of his god Ascarot, Will you destroy Gaze, Geth, and Azot? And when will I see you, alas, triumph over Israel, Reconquering your father's royal scepter? When will you give your people, inheritors Of his state and rightful dignity? When will you see the seed of Jude Placed back again into servitude under Benjamin? When will we see David driven away From the royal throne, like the traitor, who Has expelled you? Or indeed when will we see Abner avenged by you over Joabe?</p> <p>MEROBE</p> <p>Ah, it is not time, it is not time, oh, we who</p>
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De s'amuser à ces souhaits frivols !

Vivons, vivons, que la vie suffise,

Si les destins l'ont encore promise !

REZEFE

Mais à nos fils quelles places secrètes

Donnerons-nous pour fidèles retraites ?

Et en quel lieu pourroient-ils estre seurs ?

MEROBE

Dans le tombeau de leurs predecesseurs,

De Cis, de Ner, et dans les cemiteres

De Saül mesme, Isbozet et ses freres.

REZEFE

Je tremble, hélas, que ce lieu tenebreus

A la parfin ne soit malencontreux.

MEROBE

Mais nos enfants seront plutost dehors

De tout danger, si on les cuide morts.

are crazed,

To amuse ourselves with these frivolous
desires!

Let us live, let us live, may life suffice,

If the fates have again allowed it!

REZEFE

But what hidden places will we give

To our sons as secure retreats

And where could they be safe?

MEROBE

In the tomb of their ancestors,

Of Cis, of Ner, and even in the cemeteries

Of Saul, Isobozet and his brothers.

REZEFE

Alas, I fear that this dark place

In the end may be one of doom.

MEROBE

But our children will also be out of

Every danger if they are believed to be dead.

REZEFE

Si on le sçait ?

MEROBE

Celons nostre dessein.

REZEFE

Si on les cherche?

MEROBE

Ils sont ja morts de faim.

REZEFE

Mais faudra-t-il qu'ils soient toujours cachez ?

MEROBE

Mais seront-ils aussi tousjours cherchez ?

REZEFE

A la parfin quelqu'un nous trahira.

MEROBE

REZEFE

And if one finds out?

MEROBE

Let's conceal our plan.

REZEFE

If people look for them?

MEROBE

They have already died of starvation.

REZEFE

But will it be necessary for them to always be hidden?

MEROBE

But will they also always be hunted?

REZEFE

In the end someone will betray us.

MEROBE

Nostre ennemy tandis s'adoucira,
Et Dieu toujours ne sera coléré

REZEFE

Las, quelle peur en les cachant j'auray!

MEROBE

« Que l'asseuré se sauve comme il veut,
« Mais le chetif se sauve comme il peut.
Doncq' sauvon'-les ainsi que nous pourrons
A ce jourdhuy, puis nous les cacherons,
La nuict venue, en quelque humble cité
De Benjamin, pour mieux estre en seurté.
N'avons-nous pas Jabes en la Galade,
Pour nos larcins convenable brigade,
Et qui du bien du roy epoinçonnee,
Soulagera volontiers sa lignee ?

REZEFE

Donc ce pendant, ô mon espous, reçois
Tes chers enfans que j'inhume avec toy
Comme ja morts, si tu ne les défens :

During that time our enemy will be assuaged,
And God will not always be angry.

REZEFE

Alas, what fear will I have in hiding them!

MEROBE

“Let the fearless be saved as he wishes,
“But let the fearful be saved as best he can.
Let us therefore save them just as we can
On this very day, then we will hide them,
After night has fallen, in some humble
City
Of Benjamin in order to be safer.
Do we not have Jabes in the Galade,
A suitable force for reclaiming our children,
And who will gladly relieve his people
That has been incited by the king's riches?

REZEFE

Thus, oh my husband, receive nevertheless,
Your dear children, whom I bury with you
Like those already dead lest you not defend

Doncques venez, venez mes chers enfants
 Vous enterrer, à fin que vous viviez.
 Mais qu'avez-vous? Je voy que vous fuiez
 D'entrer dedans une tombe si laide,
 Mais, las, il faut qu'à la fortune on cede.
 Despouillez-moy vos cœurs fiers et constans,
 Et vestez ceux que vous donne le temps.
 Mettez, mettez la paternelle gloire,
 Et Jonathan hors de vostre mémoire.
 Laschez la bride à la chance mauvaise,
 Et à fin d'estre orgueilleux à vostre aise
 Une autre fois, qu'ores l'orgueil vous tombe.

MEROBE

Venez, venez entrer vifs à la tombe,
 Ains que tous morts ce jour on vous y mette :

them:

So come, come my dear children,
 To be buried, so that you may live.
 But what do you have? I see that you are
 fleeing
 From entering inside this so ugly tomb,
 But alas, you must yield to fortune,
 Lay bare to me your proud and steadfast
 hearts,
 And vest yourselves with those that time
 grants to you.
 Put on, put on, the paternal glory,
 And vest yourselves with those that time
 grants to you
 Put on, put on, the paternal glory,
 And put Jonathan outside your memory
 Let bad luck run free,
 And in order to be proud to the fullest extent
 At another time, rather than now when pride
 overcomes you.

MEROBE

Come, come, enter the tomb alive,
 Just as all dead are placed there today:

Vous y aurez (comme je souhaite)
 Quelque salut, si Dieu de nous a cure,
 Ou s'il nous hayt vous aurez sepulture.

LE CHŒUR

« Pour neant l'humaine force
 « De contredire s'efforce
 « A l'ordonnance fatale,
 « Car ny puissance royale,
 « Ny d'estre vaillant et fort,
 « Ny d'avoir l'esprit accort,
 « Ny mesmes l'experience
 « De la magique science,
 « Ne sçauroit contrevenir
 « A ce qu'il doit avenir :
 « Car qui mesme auroit presage
 « Au vray du futur dommage,
 « Et seroit avant-certain
 « Des menasses du destin,
 « Si ne peut-il, quoy qu'il face,
 « Tromper ce qui le menace.
 « Voyla pourquoy Dieu se rit
 « Des humains, qui leur esprit

You will know (as I desire) some salvation
 there,
 If our God cares for us,
 Or if He hates us, you will have another tomb.

CHORUS

"For no apparent purpose human strength
 strives
 "To oppose the fatal command
 "For neither royal power,
 "Nor being valiant and strong,
 "Nor having a quick mind,
 "Not even the insight
 "Into occult knowledge,
 "Could counter
 "What must occur:
 "For even he who would foresee
 "The truth of future loss,
 "And who would be certain in advance
 "Of the threat of destiny.
 "Whatever he may face, if he cannot,
 "Circumvent what threatens him.
 "That's why God laughs at
 "Humans, who employ their minds

« Employent par vaine cure	In vain against future happenings.
« Contre la chose future.	For when one fears fate,
« Car quand le destin on craint	Then destiny overtakes us again,
« Lors le destin nous r'attaint,	And, rather, when we think we have escaped
« En tant plustot on l'avance	fate,
« Quand echapper on le pense.	Rather, it comes upon us that much more.
Tesmoings en sont nos ayeus,	Our forefathers have witnessed it—
Qui de leur frere envieux	Our forefathers, who, jealous of their brothers
Par leurs craintes accomplirent	Fulfilled through their fears
L'effet de ce qu'ils craignent.	The result of what they feared.
Tesmoing le roy de Memphis,	Witness the king of Memphis,
Qui voulant l'arrest prefis	Who, wanting to destroy, to its misfortune,
Du ciel à son dam, destuire,	The predestined decree of Heaven,
Ne sçeust oncq Moïse occire,	Never knew how to kill Moses,
Combien que les enchanteurs	Although the oracles
Luy predissent ses malheurs,	Predicted to him his misfortunes,
Des l'heure que l'enfant mesme	Since the very hour that the child himself
Saboula son diadème ;	Tossed away his crown;
Tesmoing encor ce devin,	Again witness this seer,
Qui contre l'arrest divin,	Who, wanting to curse Israel countering divine
Voulant Israël maudire,	decree,
Fut contrainct de le benire.	Was forced to bless it.
SAUL est aussi tesmoing,	Saul is also a witness
Qui pour la peine et le soing	Who through the pain and care that one saw

Qu'en vain on luy a veu prendre,
Pour exterminer son gendre,
Ne sçeust faire que David
A la par fin ne ravit,
Par l'ordonnance divine,
De son regne la saisine.
Si donc en l'arrest du ciel
Dieu n'admet aucun rappel,
En vain Merobe labeure,
Que sa lignee ne meure,
Car si Dieu leur a prefis
La mort, rien n'ayd'ra ses fils.

Him take in vain,
In order to wipe out his people,
Did not know how to prevent
David from snatching away at the end
The possession of his kingdom,
That was divinely decreed.
If therefore God does not condone any
recourse,
Merobe toils in vain
Against the decree of Heaven;
May her heirs not die,
For if God predestined death to them
Nothing will help her children.